

Prussian Presents—Military and Millinery

Anneliese W. Moore

In her article "Palace Portraits" Rhoda E. A. Hackler calls attention to the various gifts which were exchanged between a number of European states and the kingdom of Hawaii at moments of more or less adroit diplomacy.¹ One of the states involved was Prussia, and the earliest gift in question was a feather cloak worn by Kamehameha I and presented by his son, Kauikeaouli (Kamehameha III), to King Frederick William III of Prussia.

In Hackler's discussion of letters and presents from Hawaii, or Prussia respectively, two questions are left open. One has to do with the identity of the painter who created the portraits of Frederick William III and Blücher; the other concerns the length of time which elapsed between the arrival of the Prussian gifts in Honolulu in June 1831 and the date at which Kauikeaouli sent his letter of thanks—in other words, did Kauikeaouli reply immediately in 1831 or did he procrastinate until 1846?

Answers to these questions were found in recent research in Berlin, mainly in the State Archives in West Berlin, but also in the numerous libraries in both parts of that divided city. While Kamehameha's feather cloak still forms the focal point of the striking South Sea section of West Berlin's Ethnographic Museum,² documents and articles relating to early Prussian-Hawaiian relations are difficult to find because of the effects of World War II. Nevertheless, several documents specifically pertaining to the gifts sent by Frederick William III to the "ruler of the Sandwich Islands" after the receipt of the feather cloak were tracked down in the State Archives.³

These documents form part of the files of the Royal Company for Maritime Commerce, a Prussian state agency founded in the eighteenth century under Frederick II. The chief purpose of the Royal Company was the development of distant markets for goods manufactured in Prussia. It assumed importance after the Napoleonic Wars mainly due to the dynamic leadership of its president, Christian Rother, an astute economist and financial wizard.

Anneliese W. Moore is Associate Professor of European Languages and Literature, University of Hawaii.

On Rother's initiative, the frigate ship *Mentor* was chartered in Bremen in 1822 from its owners, the Delius Bros., and was fitted and equipped for the first circumnavigation of the world under Prussian sponsorship.⁴ Under the command of Captain Johann Andreas Harmssen, the *Mentor* crossed the Pacific from the east to the west in late 1823 and early 1824, flying the flag of the Hanseatic town of Bremen. Almost unnoticed, except by the omnipresent Mr. Stephen Reynolds, the *Mentor* spent three days in Honolulu (November 29 through December 3, 1823).⁵

Though the *Mentor* never returned to Hawaiian waters, Captain Harmssen and several of his officers returned to Honolulu on later voyages. Thus, in 1825, Harmssen, J. W. Wendt (a junior officer), and Wilhelm Oswald (the company's agent) were on board the *Princess Louise*, when this spanking new three-masted ship embarked on her first voyage around the world, this time flying the Prussian flag all the way.⁶

From a letter⁷ which Oswald had written after his second stay in Honolulu it is known that early in 1828 the officers of the *Princess Louise* had entertained young Kauikeaouli with anecdotes about the Napoleonic wars, and especially with tales about the military prowess of the Prussian field marshal Blücher. Kauikeaouli had also been invited aboard the *Princess Louise*, resplendent in full rigging, and equipped with eleven guns (an extravagance for the struggling Prussian economy). Salutes were fired in honor of Kauikeaouli, and it was apparently in this spirit of congeniality that the young Hawaiian had presented the royal feather cloak to the Prussian visitors.

In August 1829, the *Princess Louise* returned home from her voyage.⁸ In Berlin, the feather cloak, together with other ethnographic and scientific objects, were exhibited in the headquarters of the Royal Maritime Company. King Frederick William III, his immediate entourage, followed first by the highest state officials, then by scientists and art connoisseurs (in that sequence) viewed the artifacts. After the exhibition, the feather cloak was secured in the royal Prussian art collection.

The *Princess Louise* was about to embark on another trip around the world, and Frederick William III asked that immediate arrangements be made for the presentation of appropriate gifts to the ruler of the Sandwich Islands. After some deliberations, he sent orders to various artists, artisans, and merchants. The attached shipping list (see Appendix 1) seems to reflect the compromise between those suggestions made by Wilhelm Oswald who knew Kauikeaouli's taste, and those decided on by the king's cabinet and by the Maritime Trade Company.

In August 1830, two wooden crates were forwarded from Berlin to Hamburg, where the *Princess Louise* was ready to set sail. One of the crates, weighing about 30 lbs., contained the portraits of Frederick William III and of Field Marshal Blücher. These are the paintings which are now part of the Iolani Palace collection. The painter E. Gebauer, long favored and supported by the Prussian king, had been commissioned for both works. Upon their completion and after having assumed personal responsibility for the correct framing and crating of his works, Gebauer wrote a memo, dated July 20 (1830), to the

officers of the *Princess Louise*. He advised them on the manner of unpacking the paintings in order to prevent possible damage to them. Gebauer concluded his memo with wishes for safe return of the crew, and he signed his message "E. Gebauer, the painter." (See Appendix 2). This letter seems to prove conclusively that Gebauer was indeed the painter of both portraits—that of Frederick William III and of Blücher. The balance of the presents, packed in the second wooden crate and weighing about 330 lbs., consisted of nine separate, numbered parcels.⁹

For this second voyage of the *Princess Louise*, the former junior officer J. W. Wendt was promoted to commander of the ship, replacing Captain Harmssen, who had retired. This was to be Wendt's third trip around the world and his third stop in Honolulu. For this voyage a new position on board the *Princess Louise* had been created. As early as 1825, Christian Rother, the progressive president of the Royal Prussian Maritime Company, had suggested that a naturalist accompany the expedition.¹⁰ Upon recommendation of Alexander von Humboldt, Franz Julius Ferdinand Meyen, a young botanist, who also had a degree in medicine, was chosen to fill the post, doubling as the ship's physician and as naturalist. Dr. Meyen had been given special instructions to go beyond the customary pursuits of collecting ethnographic and scientific samples. He was to make as many observations as possible in a wide range of fields. The results of Dr. Meyen's professional observations are incorporated in three volumes.¹¹ In volume two we find his very detailed description of the ten days which he spent on the island of Oahu, from June 24 through July 2, 1831, and the following passages represent the highlights of the exchange of gifts and letters based on the Meyen report.¹²

After the *Princess Louise* had cast anchor in Honolulu harbor on Friday, June 24, 1831, the ship was immediately visited by Kuakini, who had only recently assumed the governorship of Oahu. The Prussians were informed that Kauikeaouli was out of town "at a country estate three miles away," but a messenger was dispatched to report to the king the arrival of old friends and royal gifts.

Later in the day, Captain Wendt and Dr. Meyen disembarked and rode to the fort in order to be on hand at Kauikeaouli's return from the country and to present to him a letter from the Prussian king. On that occasion they also wanted to secure for Dr. Meyen permission to visit any part of Oahu. The young scientist was eager to start his botanical exploration, and permission to carry through his plan would best be obtained prior to the presentation of the gifts from Berlin.

Captain Wendt and Dr. Meyen were able to present the letter that same evening. Kauikeaouli received the Prussian emissaries in a large open area in front of the royal compound. Kaahumanu was also on the scene, yet apparently she remained on the sidelines. Also witnessing the meeting were "four of Liholiho's widows." The conversation was carried on in the Hawaiian language with the help of an interpreter, "a North American merchant," and one of Kauikeaouli's first inquiries was about the presents. After having been introduced to Kaahumanu and after having secured permission to visit any part of

Oahu, Wendt and Meyer were dismissed with the understanding that the presents were to be delivered, publicly, on the following day in Kauikeaouli's residence.

During the morning of June 25, the crates from Berlin were landed and conveyed on two-wheeled carts to the royal court. There Hawaiians and foreigners were assembled to observe the spectacle. The honor guard presented arms. Wendt and Meyen were led into a spacious hall "140 feet long," where Kauikeaouli and Kuakini were seated on a bench. The Prussians were invited to sit down opposite the two aliis, and only then were the crates brought in and opened in front of the spectators. The Prussians "made an effort to display the objects in a certain sequence in order to create the best effect"—possibly by adhering to directions from Berlin—and by opening the parcels according to the numbering on the detailed shipping list. Kauikeaouli put on the uniform "with the aid of his secretary Halilei" (Meyen obviously meant Timothy Haalilio, the young chief who was Kauikeaouli's private secretary), and a white horse was brought in order to show off the saddle which had been among the presents. Dr. Meyen, in full awareness of the diplomatic importance of his mission, recorded in his description of the scene that "above all the splendid paintings of His Majesty the King of Prussia and of Count Blücher, which Kauikeaouli had desired to obtain, were beheld with pleasure by everybody present." In later years, visitors from Germany reported seeing the paintings in Iolani Palace.¹³ Greatly admired also were five cast iron statues of those men who had shaped the fortune—or fate—of Prussia: Frederick II, Napoleon, Frederick William III, Blücher, and Tsar Alexander. Some lithographs, depicting the various troupes of the Prussian army, circulated among the rapt spectators. Not only the martial aspect of Prussian culture, but also its manufacturing genius was appreciated. Among the presents there was, for example, a very fine bonnet with artificial flowers. This product of Prussian millinery—and some similar finery—was to be given to Kauikeaouli's wife "in case there was one." Meyen describes how these gifts attracted the attention of Kinau, the king's older half-sister. She put on the bonnet together with a necklace and a bracelet, the latter being somewhat skimpy for her royal dimensions, much to the embarrassment of the Prussians. Kauikeaouli asked Kinau to take off the finery, as they were not intended for her, and she obeyed instantly with good grace. None of the ladies present was permitted to keep any of the gifts; "Kauikeaouli wanted them all for himself."

After having delivered the presents in due form—a ceremony which lasted about four hours—the Prussians took their leave, and Dr. Meyen immediately made use of the permission granted to him during the audience of the night before. The same afternoon he departed for a weekend excursion into the Koolau mountains in the company of the "amiable Dr. Ruck" (Dr. T. C. B. Rooke)¹⁴ availing himself of the hospitality of "Madame Boki," in whose country house he spent the following two nights.

According to the *Princess Louise's* calendar, only one week was allotted for a stay in Hawaii, and therefore the diplomatic and the scientific events had to be scheduled very tightly: On Monday night, Dr. Meyen returned from his

excursion to the *Princess Louise*, and on Tuesday a shipboard dinner was given, in compliance with royal orders from Berlin, in honor of Kauikeaouli and his entourage.¹⁵ At this dinner, the young king wore the new Prussian uniform, though without the sword, the plumes, and the spurs. The paraphernalia were omitted upon advice from the missionaries.

On Thursday, June 30, 1831, Captain Wendt and Dr. Meyen paid their third and, as they had hoped, final visit to Kauikeaouli. They expected to receive a letter for the Prussian king. "Kauikeaouli told us that he had written the letter, though he did not remember where it was located at that moment; two days later, Captain Wendt received the document and only then he was able to depart from the island."¹⁶ This statement is corroborated by Stephen Reynolds' Journal, entry of Saturday, July 2, 1831.¹⁷

Kauikeaouli's letter, which was written in Hawaiian with an English translation by Mr. Bingham, definitely reached the Prussian court. During or before the year 1912, it was in the possession of the Prussian Maritime Company. Apparently it was written by Kauikeaouli himself

in the Hawaiian language, with an English translation added. Both were—according to the manner of that time—put into an envelope made of a folded piece of paper. The envelope was addressed "To His Majesty Frederick William King of Prussia". On the reverse the envelope had a seal the size of a two-mark coin. The letter does not show any crest or signet imprint. Since the letter was not postmarked, one may assume that it was transported by the ship *Princess Louise*. The German translation which has been added at some later date runs as follows: "Great love to you, King of Prussia, my friend! I and all of the great ones here send our tender greetings to you and your noblemen. I have just received your gifts. I rejoice at the excellence of the objects which I have obtained: a royal uniform, hat, sword, paintings, saddle, and all the other objects. I have likewise received your letter. I assure you that I shall comply with your request to protect your subjects when they visit my islands. May blessings be upon you forever and peace be with you and your kingdom."¹⁸

At the beginning of this century, Johann Friedrich Meuss, a high official with navy experience and professional training in library science, was able to make use of the still intact files of the Prussian State Archives. On the other hand, Meuss was not cognizant of Meyen's printed report, for he states, erroneously, that the "manner in which the gifts were presented cannot be reconstructed." The circumstance that Meuss, in 1912, had access to Kauikeaouli's letter of 1831 would make the Hawaiian king's more political letter of 1846 to Frederick William VI, the son and successor of Frederick William III, a second "thank-you-note." The first one, that of June 1831, can be considered Kauikeaouli's spontaneous reaction. A note in Meyen's report conveys the ambiance in which this document had been conceived and written and it might also explain why there was no copy made and retained in Honolulu. "Kauikeaouli was stretched out on a bench in his large house. Two or three of his friends were having a repast with him, while his servants were grouped on mats, forming a wide circle and entertaining him with their stories."¹⁹

As things stand now, it can be said that the letter of 1831 was written by Kauikeaouli in Hawaiian, and translated into English by Bingham.²⁰ The

German translation later added to it was published by Meuss in 1912 and forms the basis for the English translation rendered above. In order to come back to the authentic origin of this chain of translations, it is hoped that the 1831 letter will be retrieved, before long, in the dispersed files in Germany.

NOTES

- ¹ Rhoda E. A. Hackler, "Palace Portraits," *The Hawaiian Journal of History*, 5 (1971), pp. 39-49.
- ² Listed at the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin, under Cat. No. VI 366.
- ³ Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.
- ⁴ Letter, November 11, 1971, Staatsarchiv Bremen.
- ⁵ Stephen Reynolds, Journal, entries of Friday, November 27, 1823, and Sunday, November 30, 1823 (Microfilm, HMCS).
- ⁶ Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Rep. 109 Acc 3/47.
- ⁷ Letter dated (Canton) June 30, 1828, as quoted in Johann Friedrich Meuss, "Die Beziehungen König Friedrich-Wilhelms III. und König Friedrich-Wilhelms IV. zu Kamehameha III. von Hawaii" in *Hohenzollern-Jahrbuch* 1912, p. 67.
- ⁸ Johann Friedrich Meuss, "Die Unternehmungen des Königlich Seehandlungs-Instituts zur Emporbringung des preussischen Handels zur See", in *Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Meereskunde an der Universität Berlin*, Dezember 1913, p. 80.
- ⁹ Letter Seehandlung to Oswald, Hamburg, August 9, 1830. Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Rep. 109 Acc 3/47.
- ¹⁰ Geheimes Staatsarchiv, Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, Rep. 109 Acc 3/47 No. 903.
- ¹¹ Dr. F. J. F. Meyen, *Reise um die Erde* ausgeführt auf dem königlich preussischen Seehandlungsschiffe Prinzess Louise, kommandirt von Capitain W. Wendt in den Jahren 1830, 1831 und 1832, Band 1, 2 Berlin 1835; Band 3 Breslau, Bonn, 1834. A review of this work was published in the *Foreign Quarterly Review*, Vol. XV. March and July, 1835, American Edition, New York. Publisher: Theodor Foster.
- ¹² Meyen, vol. 2, pp. 98-110.
- ¹³ Adolf Marcuse, *Die hawaiischen Inseln*, Berlin 1894, p. 154.
- ¹⁴ Meyen, vol. 2, p. 111.
- ¹⁵ Meyen, vol. 2, pp. 144-145.
- ¹⁶ Meyen, vol. 2, p. 160.
- ¹⁷ Reynolds' entry of Saturday, July 2, 1831.
- ¹⁸ Meuss, 1912, pp. 71-72.
- ¹⁹ Meyen, vol. 2, p. 160.
- ²⁰ Reynolds' entry of Friday, July 1, 1831.

Appendix 1

LIST OF THE PRESENTS

for the ruler of the Sandwich Islands. To be transported by the Maritime Commerce Company ship *Princess Louise*. By royal cabinet order of June 24 (1830)

- | | | |
|------------------|--------------|--|
| <i>Box No. 2</i> | Parcel No. 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one saddle with straps, and stirrup straps with saddle attachments 2 one pair of silver-plated stirrup footplates 2 one horse's bridle with gold-plated studs, complete, with holsters 2 one set of parade straps with cross belts 2 one ornamental horse whip 2 one twin set of pistols 2 one pair of silver spurs 1 one parade saddle cloth with the insignia of the Prussian guard hussars 1 one uniform of the 1st Prussian guard regiment 1 one pair of uniform pants 7 one pair of silver-plated general's epaulettes with leaves 1 one silver-plated sword 8 one infantry sword 1 one sword belt 9 one general's hat with insignia and plumes |
| <i>Box No. 1</i> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one oil painting, half-length portrait of His Majesty the King, with gilt frame one oil painting, half-length portrait of Prince Blücher von Wahlstadt, with gilt frame |
| <i>Box No. 2</i> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 six booklets with representations of the Prussian army, lithographs, gilt edge, in moroccan folder, gold inlaid 9 one map of Prussia 9 four views of buildings of Berlin, lacquered, gilt frames 9 one map of Berlin, mounted 9 one view of Berlin, mounted and lacquered, with explanations 3 one camp-stool, embroidered |

Box No. 2

- 6 one lamp shade, porcelaine
- 4 one iron bust of His Majesty the King
- 4 one iron statue of Alexander
- 4 one iron statue of Napoleon
- 4 one iron statue of Frederick II
- 4 one iron statue of Blücher
- 1 one lady's dress, silk
- 1 one shawl, crêpe de Chine silk
- 1 one scarf, ponceau flor material
- 5 one bolt of lace, 38 yards long
- 5 one fashionable bonnet with flowers
- 1 six pair of dyed silk shoes
- 9 one piece of fine linnen
- 1 one dozen of fine ladies' shirts
- 1 six pair of ladies' hose
- 9 one set: comb, bracelets, earrings, and necklace,
with white jewel decoration
- 9 one toiletry box, mahagony
- 5 various perfumes
- 5 one tortoise shell comb
- 5 one wooden comb
- 5 two toothbrushes